Item 5468 GAO/13:FPCD-81-3/Sum

BY THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Report To The Secretary Of Defense

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ORIGINAL

Automated Career Management For DOD Civilians: Performance And Potential

The Automated Career Management System, a computer-based civilian personnel inventory, appraisal, and referral system, has unrealized potential for providing information needed for day-to-day and long-range decision-making about an entire career field or an individual employee's development. DOD is not adequately using the system's capabilities.

GAO identified several weaknesses in the appraisal and referral process which must be corrected if the system is to perform effectively as a placement device. DOD must clarify the objectives of automation; specify those responsible for designing, managing, and using the system; evaluate the system's use on an ongoing basis to improve effectiveness; and train managers to use the system to the fullest.

SUMMARY

FPCD-81-3
NOVEMBER 14, 1980

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GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REPORT TO THE SECRETARY
OF DEFENSE

AUTOMATED CAREER MANAGEMENT
FOR DOD CIVILIANS: PERFORM-
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D I G E S T

The manner in which the Department of Defense (DOD) recruits, selects, develops, and uses its civilian personnel determines its ability to provide an effective defense work force and maintain ongoing military readiness. DOD's automated career management system (ACMS) has unrealized potential as an information tool for managing the Defense civilian work force.

At the present time, ACMS is the only automated system that can provide information throughout all levels of DOD management.

It is a computer-based data inventory, rating, and promotion referral system designed to provide DOD management with the information needed to assure the proper career development and placement of civilian employees in large DOD-wide career fields.

ACMS answers three basic needs in managing defense civilians:

--It provides a common framework for appraising employee development and potential.

--It makes possible a prompt DOD-wide search for candidates to fill mid-management or higher level positions.

--It provides all levels of DOD management with consistent, comprehensive work force data.

Civilians registered in ACMS have increased DOD-wide opportunities for career development, mobility, and advancement which their local installations cannot offer. The ACMS rating and referral process is timesaving. Supervisors filling job vacancies can get

a roster of qualified, eligible, and interested candidates within a day or two, compared to the normal 2 to 3 months for filling jobs by advertising. Additionally, it cuts down on time spent by employees, supervisors, and personnel specialists in preparing and evaluating promotion paperwork, as well as monitoring and reporting on personnel actions.

Yet, the ACMS appraisal and promotion referral process is not problem free. Employee and managerial complaints about the system's present and future uses have made it a subject of controversy. Several problem areas GAO noted were:

--Questionable objectivity of the ACMS appraisal instrument. (See p. 14.)

--Doubtful reliability of the rating system. (See p. 14.)

--Unknown validity of the appraisal and promotion referral process. (See p. 14.)

--No assurance that the evaluation and selection of candidates for promotion referral is job related. (See p. 14.)

--Supervisors' insufficient understanding and training in the ACMS rating and ranking process. (See p. 14.)

Under present procedures, getting consistent ratings from different raters may be more a matter of chance than of real performance or potential. (See p. 16.) Since DOD has no clearly defined performance benchmarks, supervisory ratings tend to be inconsistent and difficult to compare. Research indicates that the relevance, objectivity, reliability, and validity of supervisory appraisals are increased when supervisors are trained to make appraisals and avoid common rater errors. (See p. 17.)

Office of the Secretary of Defense staff and career management boards have not yet addressed these problems. Nor have officials distinguished between the purposes of ACMS appraisals and other appraisals required by DOD components. (See p. 18.)

Feedback from employees promoted through ACMS and their supervisors would help identify weaknesses and needed improvements in the ACMS rating and ranking procedures. Despite these weaknesses we do not believe that ACMS should be abandoned.

THE REAL ACMS PAYOFF

While there are obvious weaknesses in the ACMS appraisal and promotion referral process, the main problem is that management is not using ACMS for other purposes.

The real payoff of a system like ACMS is its ability to yield solid information th t managers can use in making day-to-day individual and long-range work force decisions and evaluations.

ACMS can:

--Aid DOD managers in forecasting specific hiring requirements and evaluating the results of recruiting efforts. (See p. 23.)

--Help DOD managers determine disparities in grade span or skill levels of their career program personnel. (See p. 24.)

--Identify employee and organization training needs. (See p. 25.)

--Help managers to better plan, program, budget, and evaluate training programs. (See p. 25.)

--Track the career development and mobility of each career program employee or groups of employees. (See p. 28.)

--Provide data for calculating the number of new executives needed in particular career fields. (See p. 29.)

--Help DOD managers identify equal employment opportunity problem areas and the impact of personnel actions on women and minorities. (See p. 30.)

Even more crucial to DOD's mission, ACMS could provide the information needed to determine shortfalls in critical civilian support areas as well as the availability and location of qualified replacements. It could function as a kind of mobilization skills bank, allowing better use of civilians in mobilization and wartime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If ACMS is to continue as an appraisal and referral device, the Secretary of Defense should direct the Assistant Secretary (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics) to:

--Determine the costs, benefits, and results of DOD-wide appraisal, referral, and selection.

--Professionally validate ACMS appraisal instruments and rating and ranking procedures to insure their objectivity, reliability, and job relatedness.

--Insure supervisors are adequately trained in how to make objective appraisals.

--Clarify the relationship between the purposes of ACMS appraisals and DOD components' performance appraisals.

--Obtain feedback from individuals placed through ACMS and their supervisors to identify weaknesses and improve evaluation procedures.

--Develop a systematic, coordinated approach to researching, developing, and using appraisal instruments throughout DOD.

Making ACMS an effective management tool requires corrective actions at several DOD management levels. The Assistant Secretary (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics), DOD components, and military services should jointly:

--Redefine and restate the need for a DOD-wide automated personnel system.

--Determine what information is needed, why, and by whom in connection with management planning, performance, and evaluation of work force planning; recruitment and selection; employee, manager and executive development; equal employment opportunity; and defense mobilization planning for civilian employees.

--Evaluate the extent to which ACMS can presently satisfy identified informational requirements.

--Determine necessary system improvements to meet unsatisfied informational requirements and direct the system operators to make such changes as are needed.

--Develop specific guidance on management uses of ACMS as a general purpose personnel information system.

--Establish an organized user evaluation and feedback procedure for suggestions on innovative system use and improvements.

--Develop guidance on the interaction between DOD-wide civilian personnel information systems and component service systems, as well as between military and civilian personnel systems.

DOD functional managers in those career fields registered in ACMS should:

--Investigate the extent to which ACMS can be used to manage the civilian work force.

--Evaluate information regularly provided by ACMS and suggest improvements that would increase ACMS' use in work force planning and civilian career management.

--Take the initiative in developing new applications for ACMS, as automated data processing career field managers have.

--Investigate the use of ACMS as a tool in defense mobilization planning.

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Additional time was not taken to obtain written agency comments. The matters covered in this report, however, were discussed with officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics) and their comments were considered in preparing this report.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACMS	automated career management system
ADP	Automated Data Processing
CAIRS	central automated inventory and referral system
DC/ACMB	Defense Contracting/Acquisition Career Management Board
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
MRA&L	Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense